Thirty Points to Challenge the Hegemonic Order in the City of Buenos Aires

> *"We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind — mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery, the increasing blurring and intermingling of identities within the realm of consumer goods, the preempting of any free or original imaginative response to experience by the television screen."*
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> *J. G. Ballard, prologue to* Crash *(1973)*

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1. Alienation is a useful concept to attempt to explain why we accept, without challenging it, our involvement in a kind of society that is deeply unequal and unfair in its most basic structures. Alienation entails not only being taken as interchangeable objects in a life project designed for the benefit of others — it also describes our reaction to the demands of a world finding us engrossed in ourselves, walking fast to get there first, impassive to the needs of others and only driven by the need to satisfy consumerist urges.

2. The city is modeled on the neoliberal hegemonic order. Living in the city implies immersing yourself in a world interpretation system that puts forward ways of life ruled by the dominance of capital over all areas of existence. The fast way to inclusion is mainly given by consumption, allowing us to share with others the same "lifestyle," conceived by marketing and advertising and disseminated by the television, radio, magazines or newspapers.

3. The consumer society is consolidated by ever expanding and renewing fictional needs. Production changes as market research and marketing consultants create new consumer niches (targets). Advertising goes hand in hand with this dynamics, constructing attractive worlds that offer new "sensations" to satisfy wishes through products promising "freedom," "speed," "charm," "intelligence," etc.

4. Advertising constructs an opinion of the world, of oneself and of the others, encouraging participation in a lifestyle that sets us socially apart in our way of dressing, eating, talking, etc. It conceals labor exploitation and alienation in production while shaping wishes and tastes, often manipulating the image of the woman as an object of seduction. Its main aim is to encourage consumption to widen the market for large enterprises and place the highest number of products in many parts of the world so as to increase their profit margin.

5. Image handling is one of the most powerful and effective tools used by (the economic, political and cultural) power to gain adherence to the dominant thought. Advertising plays an essential part, since it constructs representation spaces where it not only disseminates a pleasant image of consumption and a prototype of the successful citizen-consumer, but also naturalizes the competitive dynamics of

capitalism, encouraging us to buy products that might set us apart from those debarred from consumption.

6. Mass media are the main advertising channels. They seek to create a surplus by producing and disseminating a machinery of images, meanings, views of the world and accounts of reality aimed primarily at satisfying economic and/or political interests. Media conglomerates — encompassing radio stations, television and cable television channels, Internet providers, etc. — tend to homogenize the information they distribute and increasingly influence public opinion.

7. The mercantilist representation systems conceived by marketing place us within structures that promote meanings legitimated by power as the right and successful ones to live in the world. The goal is to regulate individual freedom by subtly imposing makeups and ways of acting, thinking and walking the urban landscape. To keep belonging, we engage ourselves in an unlimited production and consumption frenzy where the technique fosters anonymity, enabling and facilitating control by institutional technologies.

8. The prevalence of capital extends to all areas of life, altering and shaping social identity. Subjectivity is mutilated and confined to the forms used by consulting firms, which class and sort us in surveys following a series of parameters (income, place of residence, house type, ownership of car, kind of job, etc.), to evaluate us as potential customers of some "innovative" product to be marketed soon.

9. One way of sustaining product, object and services turnover is to change the supply following fashion trends. Fashion guards the acceleration of turnover time in production, in parallel with that of exchange and consumption. This is facilitated by improved communication and information devices, streamlined distribution techniques — enabling goods to circulate at an increased speed through the market system — and plastic money and e-banking transactions speeding up the reverse flow of money.

10. We are part of a hegemonic order aimed at making profits for others to monopolize them. This means living under coercion, constantly threatened by elimination or replacement. Forced to juggle so as to best fit in the narrow inclusion system, our participation goes only one way, pushing us into a labyrinth very difficult to exit.

11. The labor force is but another good that is bought and sold in the market. The prevailing forms of work nowadays are marked by precariousness, as short-term contracting in its various modes, informal work, low pay, and exploitation. This leads to a savage increase in inequality sweeping middle sectors along and further overwhelming historically disadvantaged groups, with the subsequent emergence and consolidation of marginalization and unemployment.

12. In our city, the public space — the place where collective experience gets organized — is fenced in, threatened, commodified Just as the clock marks the passing of hours, minutes and seconds, synchronizing our actions and subjecting us to discipline and the achievement of goals and targets in a specified time period, the dominant order determines the forms for bodily presence, repressing those that alter

the hegemonic view through the use of physical and symbolic violence.

13. The States of today want to see only citizens-consumers in the streets, so they regulate traffic in the public space, punishing stay and appropriation.
Fear of the outside isolates us and makes us crave for the protective matrix of our home. There we become easy prey to representations and ideologies in the mass media, which disseminate and strengthen the imposition of market subjectivity.

14. Production and consumption flows speed up and increase waste. Those who can access these worlds of constantly unfulfilled promises become the champions of the order, calling for the protection of their goods and — often — taking such defense in their own hands.

15. Shutting ourselves away in our homes is justified and encouraged by the so-called "ideology of the lack of security and safety," disseminated and amplified by the mass media, reporting on urban violence and thus reinforcing withdrawal and seclusion. The streets are shied away from as being a dangerous, constantly threatening space — an attitude in line with the increased number of locks, railings, barbed wire, surveillance through closed-circuit television, and private security services.

16. Demands for a hard line intensify the prohibition of manifestations in public spaces and reinforce the protest criminalization policy. The State power's purpose of limiting the occupation and non-disciplined use of public spaces is evidenced in the prohibition to block the streets with threats of direct repression and sanction. It is also clear in the fencing off of public squares, together with the removal of street stalls and people sleeping there; the closure and ineligibility of spaces to hold musical performances and youth-oriented activities; and the speculative growth of construction, causing eviction from places recovered for social and political purposes.

17. Moving through the metropolis conditions our senses. It overexcites the sight and hearing — forced to pay attention to changes, disruptions, threatening vehicles, passers-by, and other hurdles — and atrophies our taste and smell with an obscene supply of superfluous products. It also affects our makeup, turning us into individualistic, selfish, violent, workaholic beings, addicted to acquiring an ever increasing number of objects.

18. The urban geometry imposes a direction on the use of space and of our bodies. It guides movement to avoid the waste of time and channel our activities so as to feed the capitalist accumulation logic, or at least not to disrupt it. Technology contributes by reinforcing control when, for instance, we move with a cell phone and the signal is picked up by the various antennae, thus being very simple to spatially and temporally locate any individual.

19. We need increasingly more props to live "a full life" — or what the market sells as such. We become hybrid, half-human, half-machine beings, protected by objects aiding us to meet social demands. We are always available if we have a cell phone, always entertained with our i-Pod, always alienated and more preoccupied with the message we have just been texted than with our surroundings. Our contact with reality is further mediated by the technology we use to fight the existential vacuum.

20. The addictive use of new technologies strengthens the capitalist-bred makeup — the inhumanity in the lack of contact, utilitarianism, a false perception of reality, and the worship of individualism. As grotesque extensions of our ego, they allegedly show the world our material "success" and afford us the possibility of going a step forward towards market happiness.

21. In this tragic attempt at avoiding unwanted human contact, those who can afford its company have a faithful accomplice — the automobile. With the same logic that the system imposes nonstop movement on an individual, the automobile takes us from one place to the other. Motorists thus become easy prey to bottlenecks, crashes and threats, turning the "privilege" into a curse of constant fights, violence and aggression.

22. Traffic moves slowly in the city, and going from one place to the other becomes an odyssey, made worse by the great number of public and private vehicles everywhere. These means of transport create a large demand for fuel, compounding the country's energy crisis and adding to pollution from greenhouse gas emissions as well as to global warming.

23. Living in the city exposes ourselves to social demands promoting the development of related diseases — stress, panic attacks, anxiety, mental disorders, cardiac issues, weight problems, etc. The anesthetic inventions of the pharmaceutical industry offer temporary relief. It is mainly psychotropic drugs (antipsychotics, anxiolytics, antidepressants) that bring resignation to accept all our misfortunes, frustrations and worries so that we go on without a word of complaint.

24. The unease bred during the week is mitigated in the weekend, when we come, eager for relax and satisfaction, to the paradise of every fanatical consumer — the shopping centers. These monumental showcases for promenades, consumption and lack of freedom volunteer themselves as guarded public spaces with ideal conditions for purchasing. They also invite us to find artificially sweetened fun in cultural industry products, such as paid children's games, multi-screen popcorn movie complexes, and fast and caloric food courts.

25. The capitalist city is based upon capital circulation processes and consumption, goods and body flows; we need to know it to be able to establish cracks in its structure; unveil it not only in terms of its planning, but also in the influence of corporate, financial and State economic and political interests; expose how we comply with a standard that benefits a few so as to stop accepting, with resignation, a scenario that mostly breeds exclusion, poverty and inequality.

26. A large part of the population is deprived not only of consumption, but essentially of its most basic rights (work, house, health and education). We live in a society where the naturalization of injustice and poverty reinforce the lack of challenge to the mechanisms producing them. This allows the development of social and economic policies that increase inequality and force a large number of people to survive from a waste society.

27. The poor are the most affected by pollution caused by the waste from unrestricted production and its resulting garbage. They live near or in garbage dumps. They are far

from affording the bottled water they need due to the lack of drinking water supply or the pollution of water tables. They also suffer from atmospheric pollution as a result of emissions from waste decomposition, and are threatened by diseases passed on by animals attracted to garbage.

28. In spite of all the evidence, there are attempts to make poverty invisible. Most people do so by getting used to its existence ("there were always poor people"); others try out handout strategies; and the fewest lock themselves up in private neighborhoods built to resemble fortresses, protected from the outside by towering walls with surveillance posts and 24-hour monitoring systems operated by private security companies. Improvements in decaying urban centers often lead to the eviction of their original residents when there is a hint that these run-down areas might be restructured for residential and trade purposes and high-income people (gentrification).

29. No one believes any longer the lie that the growth of some will lead to wealth trickling down to everybody else, or the sham that "they don't work because they don't want to." We will not be forced to accept that we have to "earn our living." Earn it over whom? This should not be a competition, or a dispute with winners and losers, but the dominant power so puts it.

30. We are not trying to create a paranoid, victimizing view of the city — we aim at highlighting it as a place for the interaction of individuals, links and contradictions to open up spaces for creation and resistance. That is why we suggest an articulate reflection and understanding that unlocks the latrine of production, movement, consumption and waste, and provides us with critical knowledge that enables action.